

AU/ACSC/2010

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

LATIN AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCY: EARLY 20TH CENTURY LESSONS FOR
AFGHANISTAN TODAY

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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April 2010

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Preface

Many things from my background pushed me towards the topic of Latin American counterinsurgencies and their application to Afghanistan. I lived in Venezuela for two years where I learned firsthand how perception became reality when it comes to the heroes of Latin America's past. More contemporary than Simon Bolivar, the revolutionary "Robin Hoods" they celebrate were seen painted on walls and talked about with reverence. Men like Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Fidel Castro were equally revered as Hugo Chavez Frias, even though he was still in prison for his attempted coup. The people there seemed to appreciate the flawed man who attempted to overthrow by force the oldest continual democracy in Latin America (at the time) in the name of Bolivar and Chavez's version of "social justice," all the while literally praying for the stability in their lives that the older generation enjoyed under the dictators of the past. Chavez is now their president. There is an equal reverence for "Pancho" Villa in the Mexican American community here in the United States. A similar cult of personality can be seen in many portions of the world as evidenced by the T-shirts sold with the image of Osama bin Laden, eerily similar to the ones sold here with Guevara's image. Latin America can certainly provide lessons for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is the place I cut my teeth in combat in 2001. Mid December of that year found myself and crew ready to unleash fire from our AC-130's cannons on encampments tucked away in the Tora Bora mountains' valleys, believing bin Laden himself could be down there. We were just as frustrated as the ground controller when we could not identify "friendly" militia from Taliban and al Qaeda. The lesson of the need for well-trained indigenous forces is seared into my memory and will be discussed (including this story) further in the paper. Other counterinsurgency lessons were learned the hard way by experience and study in my Special

Operations bubble. One thing that has always struck me is the frustration good counterinsurgency practice causes among my colleagues, always the warriors but less so the diplomats. This is the reason for my study: to illuminate them to counterinsurgency's best practices and describe why when we do not have to unleash our particularly accurate destruction it is actually a good night at work.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the help and support of my classmates and my advisor, Dr. Dennis Duffin. Further acknowledgments are also warranted. Dr. Kurt Schake guided me through the proposal process. Dr. Michael Schroeder of Lebanon Valley College who endured my ignorant inquiries with patience and his knowledge and repository of primary source material proved invaluable for the Sandino portion of my paper. Also my very patient wife and extended family's longsuffering; they deserve all my devotion. I have to recognize my fellow warriors with whom I went to war; our common experiences will bond us forever. Lastly, a special acknowledgment goes to the memories and families of Sgt. Jesse Strong from Albany, Vermont, Cpl. Jonathan Bowling from Stuart, Virginia, Cpl. Christopher Weaver from Spotsylvania, Virginia, and Cpl. Karl Linn from Chesterfield, Virginia all of Company C, 4th Combat Engineer Battalion, United States Marine Corps. I wish I could have made it back overhead sooner.

Abstract

The Sandino rebellion in Nicaragua and the Punitive Expedition into Mexico confirm counterinsurgency best practices and provide insight into, and lessons for, the current conflict in Afghanistan. This paper's framework is a quick look exploratory case study of Afghanistan, the Sandino Rebellion and the Punitive Expedition with a comparative analysis of the cases' lessons learned to each other through the prism of current thought on counterinsurgency best practices.

The Sandino Rebellion and the Punitive Expedition were chosen for their parallels to the current counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and the hunt for Osama bin Laden. The cases' comparisons to current counterinsurgency best practices show cross-cultural and cross time applicability of the Latin American counterinsurgency's lessons to Afghanistan. They show the US is now on the right path in Afghanistan, but still needs to educate the military, government and civilian populace better in counterinsurgency.

Still lacking is a long-term, strategic guidance and cross governmental focus for counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and proper application of some counterinsurgency best practices, such as properly securing the border with Pakistan, the importance of properly trained and organized police forces, and applying amnesty, rehabilitation and employment programs for former or future insurgents. The primacy the host nation government and US civilian institutions should have in all aspects of the counterinsurgency is also being neglected or ignored. The Latin American examples provide a warning about mission creep if tempted to perform large force raids into Pakistan in the hunt for bin Laden or others, and show how US forces' mere presence and failure to follow counterinsurgency best practices undermined the US' strategic goals in Latin America having a lasting impact, still felt today.

Introduction

A charismatic insurgent leader leads his band in the mountains and conducts raids against a world power and its interests, causing the nation to send troops to bring to justice the leader and later suppress an insurgency. This may sound like Afghanistan today, but it also mirrors the US involvement in Mexico against Pancho Villa and the US counterinsurgency in the Sandino Rebellion in Nicaragua of the early 20th century.

Could lessons learned from the Sandino Rebellion and the Punitive Expedition into Mexico confirm counterinsurgency best practices and provide insight into the situation in Afghanistan?

Counterinsurgency in Latin America, both successes and failures, provide an excellent backdrop where lessons confirm and illustrate best practices. These best practices necessitate long-term investments in blood, time and treasure combined with patience, forgiveness and political re-integration to bring successful ends to insurgency.

Do examples of counterinsurgency in Latin America confirm what should be done in Afghanistan? What is the state of counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan? What has happened in Afghanistan to this point that has forced a change in strategy? Based on what was learned from Latin America, is General McChrystal on the right track? What could the US' Punitive Expedition into Mexico in the early 20th century possibly teach us in a similar situation in Pakistan today?

Lessons from Latin American counterinsurgency operations do indeed confirm best practices in counterinsurgency that can be applied regardless of time and culture and show the US is now on the right track in Afghanistan, but there is still much to be done. The lessons also provide a warning to the US to avoid the temptation of pursuing a similar strategy of cross

border raids in force (viewed by the populace and government as invasion) in the hunt for bin Laden in Pakistan.

The Sandino Rebellion and the counterinsurgency campaign that countered it was ultimately successful in the sense that the rebellion was crushed and the local government was eventually strong enough to carry it out on their own. While carrying it out, like in Mexico, it hurt the US' reputation and standing internationally through the perceived and real abuses that occurred. Both the good and the bad of the campaign provide lessons applicable when viewed through the crux of counterinsurgency best practices.

The lessons learned in the US' Punitive Expedition into Mexico (really counterinsurgency applied badly strategically) in its failure to capture Villa were lost in classic American historical myopia. The parallels/lessons learned cannot be ignored or the failure to capture bin Laden will only add to his myth, attract more to his cause and antagonize a friendly government as occurred with Villa and the Mexican government.

The paper uses a quick look exploratory case study framework with comparative analysis of the cases' lessons learned to current thought on counterinsurgency best practices. It will first explore the background in Afghanistan, showing the patterns of conflict and culture that affect everything the US is trying to do there. It will also explore the US' involvement up to the recent change of command and strategy that brought in General Stanley McChrystal. It will then explore General McChrystal's and the US' strategy and look at the recent tactics used to implement it. A sampling of reporting from February 2010 from different areas of the country and the Marjah campaign is used to gauge US troops' reaction to and their, the Afghan, and US governments' ability to employ the strategy.

Following Afghanistan, counterinsurgency best practices will be presented. These will be the standard by which the Latin American counterinsurgencies will be looked at and lessons drawn from, then compared with Afghanistan to show what still needs to be done.

The two Latin American examples were chosen for the eerie parallels the situations and campaigns have with Afghanistan. Hopefully the lessons this paper presents will help educate those that are on the front lines of the importance of and the reasons for the new strategic direction in Afghanistan, and illuminate the wider US populace to the importance of patience in this struggle.

Afghanistan

An outside force invades Afghanistan in the hopes of usurping a leader allegedly conspiring with another, more dangerous power. As has happened in the past, this force, three years later, recognizes the futility of their expedition and attempts to withdraw. Of the 17,000 or so in the retreating column, only one is left alive while a handful of auxiliaries escape home.ⁱ This horrible account was not the end of Soviet involvement in the 1980s, but rather the first major invasion by the British in 1839-1842. For the people in the area now known as Afghanistan (the borders of which were drawn by Britain and Russia), the celebration was short lived and Afghanistan degenerated back into tribal warfare followed by further invasions; it appears the only time they are unified in anything is when they are repelling an invader.ⁱⁱ

This same story, with minor variations, can describe the experience every invading army has had there, with the exception of the Mongols (in the 1200s) who invaded only to destroy.ⁱⁱⁱ Prior to the US sending troops, the last great western power to try to tame Afghanistan was the Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation was known to be very brutal for all sides involved. The invasion set the stage for the time of the *mujahedeen* insurgency, supported by Pakistan, the US,

Saudis, and others. Their fight and religious fervor lent the tone for the future of insurgency in Afghanistan.^{iv} Approximately three years after the Soviets left in 1989, government unity disintegrated into civil war, which quickly became lawless tribal anarchy. This disorganization was seized upon as opportunity by the primary group the US opposes in the counterinsurgency there, the Taliban.^v

The Taliban were able to take over much of Afghanistan and part of that success (that they continue to exploit) is due to the fact that they know “the Afghan people and their ways and embedded themselves in the complex Afghan web of tribalism, religion, and ethnicity.”^{vi} This kind of understanding and effort is what is required, ironically, to counter them.

The Pashtun tribe and culture is the primary source of support for the Taliban. “Culture is probably the most important factor in the counterinsurgency fight in Afghanistan.”^{vii} The tribe’s cultural code of honor [especially the two parts *Nang* (honor), and *Badal* (revenge)] is exploited by the Taliban for recruits and support. *Nang* dictates a Pashtun defend the honor of himself and family even to death, while *Badal* demands revenge if the honor of a woman is violated or a member of the family is killed. US strategy and tactics have forced Afghans to the Taliban through the code “after civilian deaths caused by coalition bombings” and nighttime raids, among other grievances.^{viii}

The Taliban takes advantage of the border with Pakistan. The border was purposefully drawn by the British to divide the Pashtun tribe with the “intent to limit Afghanistan’s political resources while creating every possible terrain advantage” to defend what was then British India to the east.^{ix} Dividing the tribe weakened them so they could not have a controlling majority in either area. Tribal affiliation tends to trump arbitrary borders, making movement easy between the two countries. For those that respect borders, this has created safe havens in Pakistan that

have been used effectively since the *mujahedeen* war against the Soviets. There is some indication that “assistance from some officials in the Pakistan government and the freedom to operate on Pakistani soil” is forthcoming to the Taliban for various reasons, mostly motivated out of self-preservation as a foil to Indian influence in Afghanistan.^x This is combined with a need to retain “a proxy force” in Afghanistan should the coalition withdraw and to prevent Pakistan’s Pashtuns from moving closer towards Afghanistan should it become “more secure and prosperous.”^{xi} Pakistan is performing a very delicate balancing act as they meet their need to support the US and coalition while ensuring domestic tribal politics do not explode in their face, all the while looking over their shoulder at their traditional enemy India.

US Involvement up to McChrystal

The events that triggered the US invasion are well documented and will not be covered here. What is of interest is just prior to the invasion, the Taliban refused to give up Osama bin Laden. This, while interpreted as an act of defiance (and it was), was a predictable move on the part of the Taliban. While quick to exploit their tribal code on the Afghans, al Qaeda is just as adept at doing so with the Taliban. Technically, bin Laden and al Qaeda were guests of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The status of a guest is one who has asylum and is protected by the host as one of his own. This hospitality is known as *Melmastia* among the Pashtun.^{xii} This type of cultural hospitality is also widely followed in the Middle East and wider Islamic world. *Melmastia* tied the hands of the Taliban; to have given up a guest, they would have lost face and honor (*nang*) and this would have seriously eroded any standing they had left among the Afghans.

After the initial intervention (after the operation known as ANACONDA wound down), Afghanistan appeared relatively pacified with the Taliban and their al Qaeda guests marginalized

by the campaign. Unfortunately, a window of opportunity was missed to secure Afghanistan completely and, over time, allowed for a renewed insurgency. “Like other Afghan leaders before him, [Afghan President] Karzai found that his writ reached no farther than the ranges of his weapons, and he was not so much a leader of Afghanistan as the Anglo-American backed mayor of Kabul.”^{xiii} “The war-ravaged population’s unmet expectations and non-Pashtun dominance of the central government at Kabul gave the insurgency impetus.”^{xiv} Government is almost non-existent outside of Kabul. “The Pashtuns, rendered vulnerable by what they perceive to be a lack of influence in the Kabul government, have been more amenable to the Taliban” and were further aggrieved by a lack of protection from local warlords and insurgents exploiting them, breaking any trust they may have had in the nascent government.^{xv}

Militarily, “US and coalition efforts were most effective when they leveraged the Afghan government and indigenous forces,” requiring the forces to be trained and capable.^{xvi} Competent indigenous forces were not on hand in December 2001 when the US relied on untrained Afghan militias to try to capture bin Laden in the Tora Bora Mountains. From personal experience the author of this paper, flying above the battlefield trying to distinguish friend from foe in the myriad mountain valleys was just as frustrated as the ground controller who could not tell enemy from militia either. The result of that fight is well known.

What showed best success militarily in Afghanistan was known as the “ink blot” strategy (drawing on counterinsurgency lessons from classics like Sir Robert Thompson’s *Defeating Communist Insurgency* in the Malaya crises). This strategy involves “setting up secure zones” where government (working with support from organizations like the local Provincial Reconstruction Team) can sustain reconstruction and support efforts.^{xvii} Once a secure zone is established, it is maintained allowing for reconstruction and relationships to form between the

locals and government. The “blot” is then expanded. Unfortunately, this was “limited to small areas of the country, since there were too few U.S., coalition, and Afghan forces to hold and expand large areas.”^{xviii} After ANACONDA, there were only about 7,000 coalition troops in Afghanistan but by 2008 there were 62,000 trying to fight the renewed insurgency.^{xix} “Western aid projects in the countryside had stalled, and in many provinces ceased, because humanitarian workers and contractors could not be protected from violence.”^{xx}

The border was also an issue with this strategy. Pakistani forces, facing challenges with troop numbers, conventional forces, a focus east towards India, and the high level of support of the locals for the Taliban “never attempted sustained clear, hold, and expand operations in the tribal areas...especially against high-and middle-level Taliban members.”^{xxi} Not only did the aforementioned complicity between the Taliban and Pakistan play a role, no nation that has ever laid claim to that region along the current border has really been able to govern it, where “even in peaceful times, going back a century to the Raj, government troops hardly dared to venture into Pashtun tribal areas along the border”.^{xxii}

Police, the government force the population is most likely to interact with and key for permanent government presence, have been neglected in Afghanistan’s past and in the US’ focus.^{xxiii} The US grew impatient with Germany’s long-term police development program, took it over and forced incompetent and in some cases corrupt police on the population, who reacted negatively to them and subsequently the government they represent.^{xxiv}

The above quick, broad look provide insight into the situation the US faced when it sent General Stanley McChrystal to head efforts there. General McChrystal, as it is well known, has a background in Special Forces. He has made significant changes in tactics and strategy in Afghanistan. The way the changes will be explored is by a sampling of reporting from the front

that occurred around February 2010, which include the Marjah campaign. They provide insight into the current state of affairs, government opinion, Pakistan's new role, the mentality and actions of the troops on the front lines (to see if McChrystal's guidance is being followed), and how the strategy will be applied by the troop surge there.

McChrystal's War

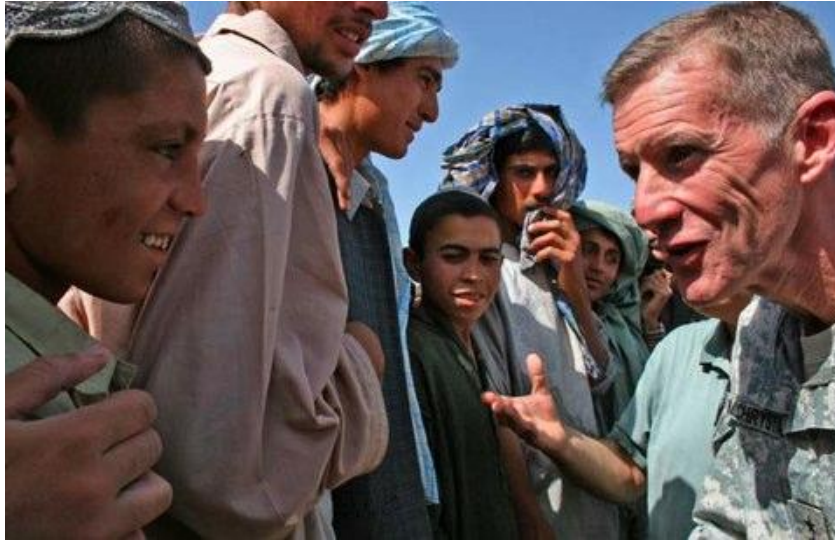


Figure #1 General McChrystal

From http://www.registan.net/index.php/2009/08/28/the-numbers-behind-general-mcchrystals-tactical-success/&usg=__GeEl6UiuyCiKB_AXI3jgMYBVr0=&h=309&w=480&sz=41&hl=en&start=8&itbs=1&tbnid=hsMcG7_jH8I7-M:&tbnh=83&tbnw=129&prev=/images%3Fq%3DGeneral%2BMcChrystal%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D18%26tbs%3Disch:1 (accessed 13 March 2010)

A major shift in strategy has occurred in the Afghanistan campaign. Notice in Figure #1 what General McChrystal is not wearing. He is not wearing impersonalizing body armor, a helmet, safety glasses, nor are there weapons visible in the photograph. Also absent from the photograph are bodyguards. The General is interacting with the children and young men present in the photograph. This is the image General McChrystal wants the Afghan people to have when they think of US troops. This is the image General McChrystal wants the world to have when they think of US troops in Afghanistan. A Reuters report of February 8 sums up the thinking rather well when it stated "U.S. military officials say shooting their way to victory will not lead

to peace in Afghanistan, and winning the cooperation of Afghan civilians is their most effective weapon.”^{xxv} These unnamed officials recognize the US’ ability to win on the battlefield does not necessarily lead to strategic victory and without the Afghan’s support their efforts will not work in the long run. The report also mentions a recent push by the Afghan government to reintegrate Taliban fighters and the coalition’s use of immediate government and US civilian presence after the military operation to help the locals rebuild their institutions and infrastructure.^{xxvi} This sounds like a renewed effort to the “ink blot” strategy that had worked well in the past when the efforts were sustained. Overall, this is part of General McChrystal’s “ambitious plan to conduct a robust population-centric counterinsurgency, which will be bolstered by the 30,000 troops President Barak Obama is sending to the theater.”^{xxvii}

There is a major leading role for the Afghan government and its forces in the latest efforts. Also important to the strategy is letting the local populace know, in the case of Marjah, when the Associated Press paraphrased General McChrystal “that an Afghan government is on its way to replace Taliban overlords and drug traffickers” once the area is secure.^{xxviii} This represents the new operational strategy for Afghanistan, but there appears to still be strategic debate to the direction the campaign should take between the UK and higher echelons of the US government.

The UK defense secretary, Bob Ainsworth, expressed his government’s willingness to go along with the Afghan government’s push to re-integrate and find a political solution to the insurgency, when he said, “I don’t believe reintegration is something you do after victory. This is not total war.”^{xxix} The US, on the other hand, expressed more of a need to look towards a military solution first before such issues can be settled. The US special envoy to Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, mentioned the importance of the peace process but cautioned, “it must go hand in

hand with security success. It requires military success to make progress.”^{xxx} What may be making the US nervous is an amnesty law for Taliban fighters, granting them immunity from crimes committed not only during the recent insurgency but also from their rule of Afghanistan, a law human rights groups and others object to.^{xxxi}

What has also changed is Pakistan’s willingness to engage the Taliban in the provinces along the border. Pakistan has combated and pushed into areas that have been contested for over a year, but their tactics seem to be a bit harsh. A report has called them “scorched earth tactics” after the destruction being wrought in urban areas, but the Pakistanis seem willing to rebuild infrastructure, albeit slowly.^{xxxii} As demonstrated by a combined forces raid in the capture of a key Taliban leader Mullah Baradar, Pakistani leaders “have gradually come around to the view that they can no longer support the Taliban.... without endangering themselves.”^{xxxiii} The Taliban’s own actions in Pakistan caused this change. American officials have long tried to convince the Pakistani government of the dangers of their tacit support for the Taliban, and recently “American officials have said they have seen indications that the Pakistani military and spy services may finally have begun to distance themselves from the Taliban” along with the renewed military campaign against them.^{xxxiv} The Pakistanis are still hampered by local cultural and religious sensibilities in the campaign. Mosques are used as networks for recruiting and sustaining the insurgency, and “Pakistani authorities generally take a hands-off approach for fear of riling the locals.”^{xxxv} They are still treading a fine line in assisting the US with the counterinsurgency.

There is also a re-emphasis on making amends (required by the Pashtun tribal code) when tactical mistakes occur. These tactical mistakes can have strategic consequences. Early in the fight for Marjah a strike by a GPS guided rocket artillery system destroyed a home killing 12

civilians. General McChrystal immediately issued an apology and commenced an investigation, and the local commander on the ground apologized personally to the village elder, a relative of those killed. Also, at great risk to themselves, the Marines treated the wounded and evacuated the bodies of those killed for quick burial, required by culture and religious law.^{xxxvi} The way the coalition handles these types of situations, regardless of who is at fault, is essential to gain or maintain the Afghan government and local population's patience.

Population control measures and an added emphasis on police forces are also receiving renewed focus. As the build up to the Marjah offensive occurred, the British forces operating in Helmand province set up roadblocks to seal off the area. "Nearly every male stopped was fingerprinted and photographed as part of the effort to build up the intelligence picture of people living in Helmand, known as human terrain mapping."^{xxxvii} This type of evidence can be used to help separate the insurgents from the local civilian populace. In addition to these controls, the local police forces are to be hired, in part, from the local populace in the area after the offensive concluded.^{xxxviii}

How is this shift in strategy being implemented? Are the troops on the ground able to carry out the strategy in sound tactics? What do they think of their new rules of engagement? Have there been any tangible results already in the short time the strategy has been in place? These questions will be explored next. After all, strategic guidance is nothing without buy-in and proper implementation by the "strategic corporal" and officers tasked to carry out the guidance.

In looking over recent news reports one can see a real sense of frustration, and in some cases disagreement with the new strategy and the rules of engagement the strategy dictates. This is understandable for troops in combat who in the past have been less restricted in engaging the enemy. On the other hand, many also understand the reasons behind the strategy, and are seeing

positive results. One thing American troops are not reserved about is expressing their opinions, as evidenced by the following reports. For instance:

Not everyone is sold on Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal's "protect the population" mantra. Some military officials think an expansionary push by the Marines into Taliban territory...is more effective than hunkering down to the slow work of improving governance. "I'm not a big fan of the population-centric approach. We can't sit still. We have to pursue and chase these guys," said Col. George Amland, deputy commander of the Marine expeditionary brigade in Helmand province. "I haven't seen any evidence it's working. The only thing that's working is chasing them."^{xxxix}

This has been the US' strategy for the past nine years, but the results of the strategy speak for themselves.

In an area known to widely support the Taliban called Pashmul, conventional US Army forces are very vocal about the effect the new strategy is having on their mentality and perceived ability to fight. Sergeant First Class Samuel Franz of Charlie Company of the 1st Battalion of the 12th Infantry Regiment was quoted as saying "It's like fighting with two hands behind your back. We're so worried about not hurting the population's feelings that we're not doing our jobs."^{xl} An understanding of the reasons why the strategy is in place does not substitute for what is perceived as concrete results on the ground. "Between patrols, soldiers openly speak of being betrayed. 'It doesn't matter if we get killed- we're here to die,' [said] Lt. Mark Morrison.... 'Our lives are not valuable enough to protect.'"^{xli} Obviously a very frustrated combat commander coming to terms with the rules of engagement the new strategy dictates.

Not all the troops have publicly reacted so negatively. But there is still frustration with reconstruction efforts. In another town, Senjaray, west of Kandahar, the local US commander there, a Captain Ellis, is having a hard time trying to get reconstruction efforts going. The area was the responsibility of Canadian forces who said "We couldn't give money away because the people were afraid the Taliban would kill them."^{xlii} Now Captain Ellis is trying to provide

“potential insurgents with jobs...a key priority for commanders in recently secured areas of Southern Afghanistan such as Senjaray.”^{xliii} Not all is secure though as the “town’s unemployed men prefer to stay home for fear of Taliban retribution. ‘You can have all the money in the world, but no one will pick up a shovel until they feel secure,’ [said] Capt. Ellis.”^{xliv} Also in this case Captain Ellis is frustrated by local elders who get him to pay for agricultural development that benefits them directly but unfortunately the crop of choice is the opium poppy, profits of which feed the insurgency.^{xliv} This approach will take a long time to carry out, as security is still not to the levels the locals feel comfortable enough to openly work with the Americans and on projects the Americans would rather accomplish versus increasing opium production.

Part of the strategy focuses on reintegration of Taliban insurgents. The coalition is trying to offer insurgents “jobs on the assumption that they would rather earn a salary than spend their days fighting” and this has been successful, but with a catch.^{xlvi} In western Afghanistan’s Herat, these efforts are still falling short mainly due to the inability, for whatever reason, of the government to get their pay to them. Many are rejoining the insurgency due to this disparity. One farmer outside of Herat “viewed the government as his enemy after his well ran dry” while other locations received irrigation aid. The farmer, named Sharif, was quoted as saying: “Since the government has been established, it hasn’t done anything for us. Nobody paid attention. Nobody came to see what our problems were...The farming stopped, so I decided to join the Taliban.”^{xlvii} Nearly three hundred insurgents “surrendered to the provincial government, many drawn in by incentives offered by the local reconciliation office...but for the past four months, the government has honored none of these commitments” forcing many back to the insurgency.^{xlviii} It will be a difficult, long road ahead in Herat to win back these people.

These examples are not everywhere in Afghanistan. General McChrystal said the rules of engagement were tightened “so that troops use overwhelming firepower only when there is no other way to defend themselves”...[and that they do this with] “extraordinary efforts by a lot of people, often at great risk to themselves, to show restraint...at the end of the day, our security comes from the people. The better we protect the people the fewer IEDs [improvised explosive devices] there will be. In the long term, the restraint actually secures us.”^{xlx} Most troops understand this.

As they were preparing for their push into Marjah, Marines were “keenly aware of the one factor that could snatch defeat from the jaws of victory: Afghan civilian casualties. Deaths of noncombatants in clashes involving Western troops and insurgents are one of the bitterest points of contention between President Hamid Karzai and his foreign allies.”^l Marines talked with the locals, promising to repair and pay for damaged infrastructure and using limited air and artillery support, and showing restraint with small arms. “That restraint helped the Marines win a measure of acceptance from tribal elders. So did the follow-up efforts to establish safety and governance: reopening bazaars, repairing irrigation canals, protecting local officials who were under Taliban threat.”^{li}

Around Kandahar, the US Army is trying to secure the highways, hoping to revive the local economy in small villages “and restore credibility to the local government.”^{lii} The unit carrying out this mission had more killed than “any other Army battalion in Afghanistan” when they took over the mission last year, but that has changed^{liii} The local government and infrastructure were non-existent, but little changes have helped not only the locals and also the unit in terms of a diminishing casualty count. “As the roadside bombs have tapered off...more

residents come to them with information. School attendance has grown quickly” and mutually beneficial relationships are built.^{liv}

There is obviously still much to be done in Afghanistan in regards to security, government and winning the local populace. General McChrystal’s strategy is understood by the troops on the ground, but not all are in agreement to the efficacy of the strategy as they struggle to apply the strategy tactically. The victories are small and so far localized where security can be guaranteed, but what about the overall campaign? Is General McChrystal on the right track? What does the current thought on counterinsurgency say? Are there examples from the past that confirm or emphasize the importance of the strategy? Why do tactical decisions made on the battlefield have strategic consequences? What is missing in the campaign? In order to answer and understand these questions, one needs to know counterinsurgency thought and best practices.

Counterinsurgency Best Practices

“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.”

-T.E. Lawrence, Article #15 of *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917.

Although Lawrence (the famed Lawrence of Arabia) was writing about Arab insurgents during World War I, the above quote is an axiom on which good counterinsurgency should also rest. It talks to pride, working within the local limitations, patience and understanding. It also talks to governance, lines of authority (who should be the lead), empowerment and cultural impediments US forces may be unaware of that hamper a counterinsurgency. It is cross-cultural as one can insert a force of choice for “Arab” and any location for “Arabia.” Counterinsurgency is as much about insurgency as it is to counter it.

“In the most basic sense, an insurgency is a competition for power.”^{lv} It is about political/ideological, economic, societal control. True control takes a long time to gain. Counterinsurgencies require a long-term outlook that is not well articulated to the American public, military, and government.

An analysis of all insurgencies since 1945 shows that successful counterinsurgency campaigns last for an average of 14 years, and unsuccessful ones last for an average of 11 years. Many also end in a draw, with neither side winning. Insurgencies can also have long tails: Approximately 25 percent of insurgencies won by the government and 11 percent won by insurgents last more than 20 years.^{lvi}

This defines what long-term means when talking about counterinsurgency. As a bit of historical irony, the administration’s call for the beginning of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan set for mid 2011 will be just shy of the ten year mark of US forces in Afghanistan, just about on target for the 11 year average failure mark, and well below the 14 year average for successful counterinsurgency. There is nothing public that indicates anyone is thinking about the 20 year potential.

Patience is indeed the key to all aspects of counterinsurgency. “Disengagement from an unresolved counterinsurgency can doom an indigenous government.”^{lvii} The US does not have a good track record with patience in counterinsurgency, and the reasons are cultural. “Americans have a penchant for black-and-white clarity and have historically shown little patience for complexity and extended commitment... Americans also like to win on [their] own terms.”^{lviii} Training and educating the military, government as a whole, and the public in general about counterinsurgency is essential for success. “Counterinsurgency, like the broader struggle against terrorism, ultimately requires Americans to think differently about conflict.”^{lix} What does the US need to know about counterinsurgency?

“Counterinsurgents achieve success by destroying insurgent forces and their political organization in a given area over the long run.”^{lx} This does not necessarily mean their physical destruction per se, but also marginalizing the insurgents and their institutions through other means. Key to Afghanistan (and other insurgencies) is the need to “focus resources on developing capabilities that help improve the capacity of the *indigenous government* and its security forces to wage counterinsurgency warfare” (emphasis in the original).^{lxi} Three key historical variables “are correlated with the success (and failure) of counterinsurgency efforts: [The] capability of indigenous security forces, especially the police, local governance, [and] external support for insurgents, including sanctuary.”^{lxii} When the indigenous forces and local government are competent, provide security and the insurgents are denied sanctuary, over time a counterinsurgency is usually successful.

Dr. Kalev I. Sepp produced a list of 12 successful counterinsurgency practices and nine unsuccessful practices after looking at insurgencies and conflicts worldwide beginning in 1899 with the second Anglo-Boer war in South Africa. Dr. Sepp’s practices echo and expand the positive and reinforce the negative of what has been discussed about Afghanistan. They are:

Successful-

- Emphasis on intelligence
- Focus on population, their needs, and security
- Secure areas established, expanded
- Insurgents isolated from population (population control)
- Single authority (charismatic/dynamic leader)
- Effective, pervasive psychological operations (PSYOP) campaigns
- Amnesty and rehabilitation for insurgents
- Police in lead; military supporting
- Police force expanded, diversified
- Conventional military forces reoriented for counterinsurgency
- Special Forces, advisers embedded with indigenous forces
- Insurgent sanctuaries denied

Unsuccessful-

- Primacy of military direction of counterinsurgency

- Priority to “kill-capture” enemy, not on engaging population
- Battalion- size operations as the norm
- Military units concentrated on large bases for protection
- Special Forces focused on raiding
- Advisor effort a low priority in personnel assignment
- Building, training indigenous army in image of U.S. Army
- Peacetime government processes
- Open borders, airspace, coastlines^{lxiii}

Most of Dr. Sepp’s practices are self explanatory, but some require further illumination. US force type and structure (and the subsequent US cultural baggage, both societal and military) and US government organization impedes proper counterinsurgency.

Until the host nation’s security forces are able to take their responsibilities independently, advisors and forces trained and designed specifically for counterinsurgency are key. In the US, “only the Special Forces (SF) are expressly organized and trained for counterinsurgency warfare and advising indigenous forces.”^{lxiv} Conventional forces that have trained indigenous forces in their images have historically had poor results in past counterinsurgencies.^{lxv} Focusing on re-organization of conventional forces to fight insurgency at the expense of organizing host nation forces is a mistake.^{lxvi} In fact, use of one’s own troops rather than the host nation’s forces undermines the government and their forces in the eyes of the population, regardless of how the troops are organized. “Most counterinsurgency campaigns are not won or lost by external forces, but by indigenous forces.”^{lxvii} Focusing on providing physical security and police forces is even more difficult for conventional military units, yet police and police actions are essential for counterinsurgency. Trying to use military forces to provide these services is “difficult to carry out because of force-structure requirements, and because using Soldiers as police conflicts with the operational code of the military,” a code that is based upon offensive action and the aggressive application of violence.^{lxviii} Other aspects of US societal and military culture, as mentioned before, impedes the US’ ability to implement proper

counterinsurgency policing practices. Focusing on police and police forces is “difficult to conceive and implement because most Americans live in communities with effective policing and cannot imagine a world without security guarantees.”^{lxix} US cultural assumptions about policing hurt the US’ ability to train effective police forces, especially since most Americans have never lived in anarchy or had to deal with a local warlord. Dialing 911 is not an option. When police do come, even in the most blighted of US cities, they are usually competent, loyal to the idea of the rule of law and not as susceptible to corruption as is the case in Afghanistan.

The US military and wider society must look inwardly to change their expectations of conflict and the risks involved to affect proper counterinsurgency. In counterinsurgency, there is a “counterintuitive need to accept greater physical risks to personnel in order to achieve political and military objectives” which is especially hard for the US military that has developed a “style of warfare that institutionally minimized those risks.”^{lxx} As with inaccurate police force assumptions, “American culture and U.S. military doctrine prefer a technological solution and the overwhelmingly decisive blow.”^{lxxi} Technology removes the human factor so important to counterinsurgency, and almost no blows can be decisive against an insurgency when the answers to problems are political, not politics by other means. When force protection is one’s primary concern, second and third order effects such as the dependence on airpower (and its perceived heavy handedness), impersonal armored vehicles, and clumping forces on impregnable bases separating troops physically and mentally from the people they are trying to protect become the norm, to the detriment of the counterinsurgency.

“The focus of all civil and military plans and operations must be on the center of gravity in any conflict- the country’s people and their belief in and support of their government.... [because] this is a policy objective, it must be directed by the country’s political leaders.”^{lxxii}

This should force a synergy between military and civil government to enact a coordinated counterinsurgency strategy, directed under a larger, executive US government directed strategy in conjunction with, and subservient to, the host nation's needs. Culture will be in the way. "In almost every arena... U.S. counterinsurgent efforts will struggle to reconcile American ideas and values with local traditions, culture, and history.... without guidelines on these points, military and civilian... actors will send mixed messages and potentially work at cross purposes."^{lxxiii}

Current military doctrine is also in the way of good counterinsurgency because it becomes a crutch by which the rest of the US government hangs its counterinsurgency efforts on. This forces the military into the prime role for counterinsurgency. Even though FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* dated December 2006 is a fundamental shift in how the US military looks at counterinsurgency, the military and military doctrine cannot dictate what the US government should do in the broader strategic sense of organizing proper counterinsurgency practice. A wider approach is necessary, above the Department of Defense level to lead and coordinate counterinsurgency efforts. "The military alone cannot provide economic reconstruction, political reform, and social assistance on the scale or for the duration that most [counterinsurgency] requires."^{lxxiv} The broader US government needs proper counterinsurgency education, not just the executive. This lack of understanding hampers counterinsurgency efforts. "Congressional suspicions regarding the Commander's Emergency Response Fund program suggests unresolved larger issues and a lack of understanding of COIN requirements" in terms of flexibility and responsiveness to local needs based on the local commander's assessment.^{lxxv} Also in the doctrine is the recognized need to accept more risk, but "gaining widespread acceptance of this principle and then transforming it into practice will prove to be far more difficult."^{lxxvi} This is seen in the previously covered reporting from the recent fight in Afghanistan.

McFate and Jackson describe four tools that must be used in the political competition that defines counterinsurgency. “These tools are coercive force, economic incentive and disincentive, legitimating ideology, and traditional authority.”^{lxxvii} Coercive force must be controlled completely by the government within its borders and apply force with restraint to maintain legitimacy.^{lxxviii} The state must replace, or usurp, the insurgent’s narrative or ideology and replace it with its own in the eyes of the people.^{lxxix} Using the carrot or the stick in providing economic options for the people will draw them toward the government, and working within and recognizing traditional authority, especially in a tribal based society, is not a “social anachronism” but rather an efficient vehicle to work within to make gains in all aspects of the struggle for power.^{lxxx}

This brief description of counterinsurgency best practice presents the necessity of a holistic, strategically focused approach to counter the political goals of an insurgency. All the instruments of power available to the government/governments involved in the conflict must be used. This strategy must be subservient to the needs and strategy of the host nation and led by them, because it is indeed better for them to accomplish their war tolerably rather than you do it perfectly for them, as Lawrence mentioned. Patience and a willingness to take risks (that would otherwise be unacceptable in conventional conflict) while securing the local populace and following the lead of competent host nation policy and security forces is key. These practices will be used as the backdrop for lessons from past counterinsurgencies the United States was once heavily engaged in. Tactically brilliant at times in both, one was an operational success but a strategic failure, and the other failed operationally and strategically. These lessons come from the Sandino Rebellion in Nicaragua and the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. Both have lessons

for Afghanistan and both confirm the best practices for counterinsurgency discussed, and provide some interesting parallels and warnings for the US in its counterinsurgency fight in Afghanistan.

Counterinsurgency from Latin American History: Sandino Rebellion

General Augusto C. Sandino (shown in Figure #2) led a popular, nationalist insurgency against US Marines and Nicaraguan government forces that lasted approximately six years, from 1927 until just after the Marine's withdrawal in 1933. What led up to, the motivations behind, and the long-term consequences of the insurgency in Nicaragua are important to know to understand how the lessons learned from the counterinsurgency then apply to today.



Figure # 2: Sandino's Wedding to Blanca Arauz, May 1927

From <http://www.sandinorebellion.com/PhotoPgs/PhotosUSNA1.htm#Photo4-SandinosWedding> (accessed 13 March 2010)

Direct US intervention into Nicaragua was an off and on affair that occurred over the course of just over 20 years, with the ultimate intervention in force beginning in 1926 (after a withdrawal in 1924) to quell the civil war raging there.^{lxxxix} The US was deeply engaged in and quite literally controlled the economy of Nicaragua and these interests “required a stable political environment to survive, one conducive to growth and prosperity” for the holders of the interests back in the United States.^{lxxxii}

Strategically, the US State Department led the effort in Nicaragua and once the Marines were in place in force and established “neutral zones” where US economic interests were protected, the State Department imposed peace terms on the parties involved in the civil war. Part of the terms was supposed to be a decommissioning of the armed and political forces (called Liberals) who fought against the side the US ultimately backed and put in power (called Conservatives).^{lxxxiii} The US’ affronting presence, combined with the Liberal loss of power led Sandino, then a Liberal General, to break with other Liberals and continue to fight against the Marines and Nicaraguan government.^{lxxxiv} This led the US to carry out an “aggressive counterinsurgency campaign” against Sandino and his followers.^{lxxxv} Once the Marines withdrew officially on New Year’s Day 1933, Sandino’s insurgency no longer had its primary ideological reason to fight and a peace agreement was struck between Sandino and the government a short time later. This was violated by the Nicaraguan government when it went on to kill Sandino and crush any remaining supporters over the next year.^{lxxxvi} The lessons the Marines learned in Nicaragua was the primary basis for their *Small Wars Manual*, which combined with other lessons formed the basis for today’s FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* manual.^{lxxxvii}

Nicaraguan society in the primary area of support for the insurgency (northern Nicaragua, called Segovia) “was exceptionally violent...The violence, committed mostly by men, arose from

political disputes and fights over land, property, women, and honor.... Honor, key to an understanding of Segoviano culture, was among a man's most prized possessions" and required a man protect his property (defined to include his women and family); failure to do so would be a loss of honor requiring action.^{lxxxviii} Most in Segovia just wanted to be left alone, and in "this oral culture, news spread quickly and rumors flourished."^{lxxxix} These norms were used extensively by Sandino for intelligence gathering and as a source of recruitment when affronts, either perceived or real, occurred against the populace. This societal/cultural background is very similar to the Pashtun tribal and overall Afghan cultural situation.



Figure #3: USMC Lieutenant Orville Pennington with Severed "Bandit" Head and Child
<http://www.sandinorebellion.com/PhotoPgs/PhotosUSNA3.htm#Photo62-PenningtonHead>
(accessed 20 Feb 2010)

The counterinsurgency campaign in Nicaragua became particularly brutal and atrocities were committed by all sides in the conflict. The responsibility for discipline in counterinsurgency rests with the counterinsurgents, fair or not. Counterinsurgents are supposed to be above atrocity, perceived or real. Sandino and his supporters in wider Latin America used Figure #3 to show the

world how the US was carrying out its campaign there, and it became the conflict's (to use a more modern analogy) Abu Ghraib moment. Events like Abu Ghraib and Figure #3 obviously have a galvanizing effect, and are proof that tactical-level decisions have strategic impact in counterinsurgency. How was the campaign carried out? What sort of events happened to lead to operational success for the US in Nicaragua (the rebellion was, after all, put down) but hurt the US strategically in Latin America, reverberations of which are still felt today?

Tactical/Operational Actions and Impact



Figure #4: Rebel Hanging of Downed USMC Aviator

<http://www.sandinorebellion.com/PhotoPgs/PhotosUSNA2.htm#Photo27-AviatorThomasHangingOct1927>
(accessed 13 March 2010)

Effective tactical airpower in counterinsurgency was just developing after the total war experienced in WWI. The nascent US version of what is now called close air support was developed in Nicaragua during the campaign. Air support was also used to evacuate Marine and host national casualties. Figure #4 paints a different picture about the air war during the

campaign, one that shows the continuation of the brutality experienced on the ground. It also shows the mentality and attitude the rebels and locals had towards the terror they experienced from the sky that was used extensively in the rebel public relations campaign to gain recruits, influence wider public opinion and obtain support from outside Nicaragua.

Much of what became standard tactical and operational procedure grew out of a desire to avenge USMC losses and incidents (such as what is seen in Figure #4), the results of which negatively impacted the broader civilian community where aviation supported ground units or acted independently.^{xc} During one of the first major combat incidents of the campaign, an attack on the Marines and host nation forces (called Guardia Nacional, or GN) occurred in a town called Ocotal where airpower/close air support played a major role in fending off the attackers and set the stage for the air war. The report dated 16 July 1927 describes the aircraft strafing and bombing homes, animals, and anything that moved around the besieged garrison.^{xcⁱ} Without air support, the garrison would have been destroyed. Tactically this was a victory for the USMC and their GN troops against overwhelming odds. The perception from the destruction became a “vivid image of US aggression...” where “[m]uch of the world’s press,” including US press like the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* is quoted by Dr. Michael Schroeder, denounced the successful defense of the garrison “as a ‘massacre,’ ‘mass murder,’ and ‘wholesale butchery’” regardless of the outcome.^{xcⁱⁱ} The *perception* of the results of airpower’s use in counterinsurgency is what inflames the insurgent’s cause, alienates the population and has strategic affects that reach far beyond the borders of the country involved in the insurgency.

Later that same month, aircraft were used in a role now known as “reconnaissance by fire” as ground units pushed into towns on patrol with aircraft shooting seemingly at random ahead of the columns.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} A few weeks after the photograph in Figure #4 was taken (the hanging

occurred in October 1927), aircraft were used in a similar method to clear the way for the USMC foot patrols that secured the crash site. “The houses in the vicinity were searched and found to be occupied but temporarily deserted. Planes were sighted at 1030 and at our request dropped several bombs on the houses and a banana patch to the N[orth] of the ravine.”^{xciv} The patrol received fire earlier but were not under fire during the time of this attack.

A similar incident occurred on 2 January 1928. After an engagement where a Marine was killed, the ground force fired upon potential ambush points with their machine gun as they advanced out of the area. “From 1330 to 1500 planes strafed surrounding hills, particularly north of Sapotial [Zapotillal]. *No firing on column*” (emphasis added).^{xcv} No mention is made of the villagers of Zapotillal who fled to the surrounding hills prior to the engagement. As the campaign drug on, aircraft continued to be used in the described manner and would have strategic impact upon the US’ standing in Latin America to this day.

By analyzing the use of air power in Las Segovias, and how Segovianos, Nicaraguans, and Latin Americans perceived and responded to it, it demonstrates that the air war in Las Segovias fuelled the rebellion it was meant to suppress; that at the time and for many years afterwards, it was portrayed as an atrocity; and that it became a lightning rod for anti-US protest and a symbol in an anti-imperialist discourse.^{xcvi}

A slow ramping up of intensity in actions on the ground can also be seen from patrol reports. These shed light on the overall operational strategy of the campaign. These consisted of patrols to contact (which later took on the guise of tactics normally associated with scorched earth tactics), setting up garrisons of USMC and GN troops, securing the area, then expanding outwards.

Typically surprise raids occurred in the early morning hours and throughout the campaign. Confusion reigned as to who was enemy and who were simply defending their homes from attacks by unknown groups at odd hours. These were tactics during the earlier civil war and

tactics employed by bandits as well as government sanctioned irregulars/police. One early action in the town of La Paz Centro pitted USMC against Liberal affiliated forces (not members of Sandino's band). The Marines showed little coordination and knowledge of the local area in this engagement, as they captured a group who were later identified as being Conservative troops.^{xcvii} Counterinsurgency demands patience and knowledge of local area politics and norms.

A sampling of four reports show how quickly the ground action led to acts of questionable value to counterinsurgency. An early report from 26 July 1927 shows Major Oliver Floyd's attitude as being convinced that "further progress will be accomplished only as follows under the present conditions: (a) I will have to wage a real blood and thunder campaign... (b) I will become involved in a real small war."^{xcviii} Six months later a patrol destroyed everything in a village called Buena Vista that was being used by insurgents the patrol was pursuing (without regard or mention of the local villagers) declaring all "bandit supplies."^{xcix} Five months later a patrol report written by First Lieutenant S.E. Ridderhof is full of descriptions of killing not only insurgents but also "bandit animals," of which seven horses and thirty cattle were slaughtered and other homes and supplies were destroyed.^c

The aforementioned Major Floyd realized the long-term struggle the campaign would become and very sagely offered what is now known as the "ink blot" or "population centric" strategy in 1927.

There will be banditry, smuggling, illegal arms in this country for one and one half years regardless of what is done or whatever practical plan is adapted. The only way as I see it, to settle this country, and restore law and order, is to radiate from Ocotal gradually with all guardia as available to have the Managua Government declare for Nueva Segovia what is analogous to martial law with an American officer as the head of same -- such an officer should be a guardia officer.^{ci}

In most areas where this was implemented, local industry and agriculture began to grow again,

there were less incidents of insurgent activity, and the locals were less hostile towards the Marines. One area, early in the conflict, showed their desire for security by asking for Marine protection because they were afraid of the return of “bandits” once they left.^{cii} It is not known if the Marines stayed. Where there was security, there was industry. One patrol around an area called Richardson’s Finca (farm) showed most people encountered were working on the nearby coffee plantations, did not cause any trouble for the patrol, were not interested in the patrol’s movements and provided food for the patrol.^{ciii}

One major success the Marines had in their operational strategy was in the development of the Guardia Nacional, purposefully made to have loyalty to the government and not local politics. Over time, GN troops “transferred their Conservative and Liberal Party Loyalties to their Guardia units.”^{civ} At first Marine non-commissioned officers and other officers were given commissions in the GN and led them as one of their own. During the attack on Ocotul, the GN troops were singled out with praise and were “worthy to serve side by side with any military organization, any time, any where. The presence of [the GN] organization saved us [the USMC detachment] from being in a very serious if not fatal position.”^{cv} There is nothing but praise for the GN in all the Marine reports where they are mentioned, and the GN assumed roles local militia-type forces had in the towns they garrisoned.^{cvi} This ensured their impartiality, and combined with their competence, ensured positive government influence and presence along with suppressing insurgent activity.

Infrastructure and population control measures were also implemented. Roads were built and these served the government by aiding military travel, providing labor opportunities for locals, allowing the flow of commerce and extending government influence. This was combined with population control measures of requiring all to carry government endorsed

identification papers, allowing for anyone without them to be assumed to be against the government and separated from the population.^{cvi}

Many of the good programs that were implemented in Nicaragua had to be curtailed due to the Great Depression limiting government funds for the programs. Expansion of infrastructure programs and GN military capabilities ground to a halt because of the cutbacks in funding, extending the length of the war.^{cvi}

In spite of all the tactical and operational success, the campaign hurt the US in wider Latin America and the world.



Figure #5: Cover of Emigdio Maraboto's *Sandino ante el coloso* (Veracruz, Mexico, 1929).
<http://www.sandinorebellion.com/PhotoPgs/PhotosUSNA2.htm#Photo33-CoverMaraboto> (accessed 13 March 2010)

Figure #5 is from a pamphlet published in Mexico entitled “Sandino Against the Colossus” and shows the image the world perceived of a US Marine as a giant monstrosity crushing a

Nicaraguan village holding the smoking barrel of his Springfield (when compared to the image in Figure #1 of the very human and personable McChrystal, two very different perceptions and messages are being sent). “[T]he narrative of terror disseminated by writers, intellectuals, activists, and propagandists undermined US political and diplomatic influence throughout Latin America.”^{cix} In talking about the air war (which can be applied to the broader war as well) Schroeder writes “[t]he political fallout... reverberated across Latin America for decades, [and] became permanently inscribed in the collective memory of the southern part of the hemisphere.”^{cx}

The reverberations were not positive. Anti-US sentiment that germinated from this time in history is still felt today and was used as a point of historical reference for anti-US and anti-government movements as diverse as Castro’s 1950s movement in Cuba to the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) in Colombia. An even older source of anti-US sentiment fueled the fire in Nicaragua and broader Latin America even before the Sandino rebellion. Figure #5 was produced in Mexico. If the Marine depicted is substituted for a US Army soldier in 1916-1917 and “Villa” is inserted for “Sandino” not much would have had to been changed in the pamphlet, as historical sentiment was still burning from the invasion of Northern Mexico and the near war sparked there by the Punitive Expedition.

Counterinsurgency from Latin American History: Punitive Expedition

Similar to Afghanistan, the border between the US and Mexico is an artificial one, cut by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo that ended the US-Mexico War in the mid 1800s. It is a straight line from the western most point of where the Texas border meets New Mexico at a major northern turning S bend of the Rio Grande that currently separates El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. Like the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, the Mexico border is still unrecognizable for the

most part and divided people of the same culture, similar politics, outlook, and family lines.

Mexico was also in a continual state of political and social upheaval, especially in the traditionally restless northern border area. A push for modernization and industrialization saw foreign investment and major land purchases, pushing locals off land they lived on for centuries. Resentment at foreign interference and influence galvanized the population and factions against the government and a nationalistic uprising began in the north, with one of the leaders named José Doroteo Arango Arámbula, better known as Francisco, or “Pancho” Villa.^{cxi}

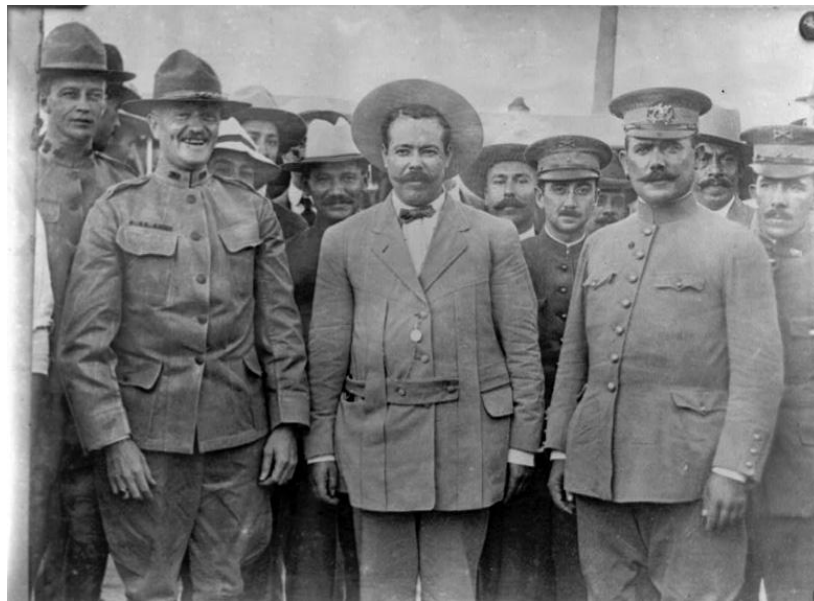


Figure #6: Pershing (left) and Villa (center)

http://www.americancorner.org.tw/AmericasLibrary/assets/aa/pershing/aa_pershing_mexico_1_e.jpg (accessed 13 March 2010)

Marginalized in a civil war, Villa continued an insurgency in Mexico’s north, and saw opportunity for plunder and notoriety north of the border in the US. Multiple cross border raids culminated in an attack (successfully repulsed) on the town of Columbus, New Mexico and the US troop garrison there. This galvanized US public opinion, “[a]s long as Villa or other bandit leaders remained free to use the border as a zone of safety, there could be no absolute guarantee for the protection of American lives and property in the southwest.”^{cxi} Instead of the usual cross

border “hot pursuit” raids against those responsible, this time President Wilson decided to send a major expedition, as written in a White House statement on 10 March 1916, with the “single object of capturing [Villa] and putting a stop to his forays. This can and will be done in entirely friendly aid of the constitutional authorities of Mexico and with scrupulous respect for the sovereignty of the Republic.”^{cxiii}

The US position towards Villa and the Mexican government disregarded both the nature of their enemy and the “sovereignty of the Republic.” “[T]he American authorities might... properly consider [Villa’s] presence as a nuisance and, taking the law in their own hands, proceed to abate the nuisance either without the cooperation or consent of the *de facto* authorities.”^{cxiv} This is precisely what occurred. The Punitive Expedition was assembled under the leadership of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, a veteran of Wounded Knee, the Spanish American War and the Philippine Insurrection.

Punitive Expedition: Results

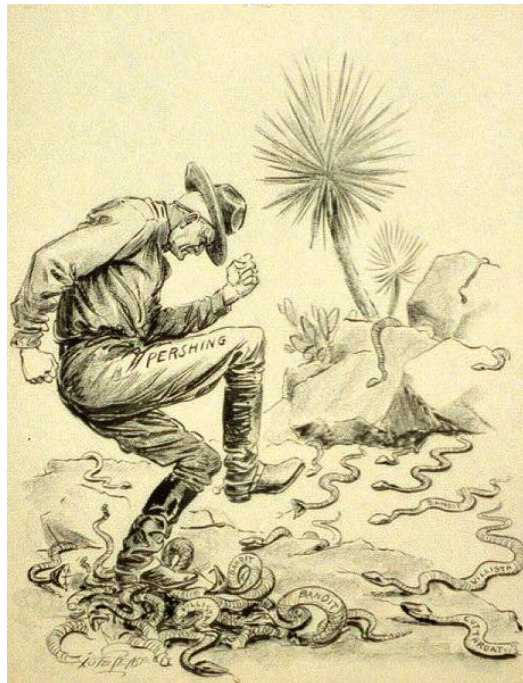


Figure #7: Political Cartoon of Pershing Trying to Kill Snakes

The results of the Punitive Expedition are quickly summed up by the contemporary (to the time) political cartoon in Figure #7. It depicts a frustrated Pershing trying to stomp to death innumerable snakes labeled “Bandit,” “Cutthroat,” and “Villista,” with more snakes emerging from the countryside. It looks like Pershing is about to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of snakes attacking him. Conventional forces cannot possibly fight an insurgency on the insurgents’ terms, the only way to stop an insurgency is find the source or motivation of the insurgents and marginalize or eliminate it.

President Wilson’s strategy with the expedition morphed from the simple goals laid out by the 10 March 1916 communique into a paternalistic tool to force the *de facto* government (under Venustiano Carranza de la Garza, a former revolutionary colleague of Villa) to bend to Wilson’s will. This was to “liberate Mexico from her troubles and restore the stability necessary for a gradual form of revolution. Thus intervention would not only help [Wilson’s] Latin neighbors but also end the borderland violence which tarnished his nation’s image in the worldview.”^{CXV} Carranza was caught in the precarious position of placating domestic nationalism and resisting hated foreign intervention while trying to cooperate with his angry neighbor to the north against a common enemy. “Though Carranza openly encouraged cooperation with the United States on the serious matter, he simultaneously composed contingency plans for resisting a possible American invasion.”^{CXVI} Unfortunately US forces came to take on the look of permanent invader when they went further into Mexico than agreed to, occupied more land than promised, mobilized reserves and eventually forced a naval blockade on Mexico when Carranza would not cooperate and Mexican Federal and US forces clashed multiple times.

While the US and Mexico were distracted parrying each other's diplomatic and sometimes military efforts, Villa's forces actually increased in strength enough that he seized and occupied Ciudad Chihuahua.^{cxvii} Pershing and others asked Wilson for a full fledged offensive using troops scattered in garrison across the northern Mexican desert, but was rebuffed by Wilson due to the further potential for all out war between the two countries, and with open US involvement in the war in Europe near.^{cxviii} Villa was decisively defeated by Mexican forces in December of 1916, a blow he could not recover from, containing him and marginalizing him in the North of Mexico, never again to be the threat to the US he was before.^{cxix} With an outrageous cost and waning public interest, US troops withdrew in 1917, never coming close to capturing Villa and never fully securing the border.^{cxx} When the Expedition returned "with neither a clear victory nor with Villa in chains, in the eyes of the nation that spelled defeat."^{cxix} Ultimately a strategic failure, what worked and did not work tactically and operationally during the campaign?

What Worked

US forces did well in ascertaining local military and militias were not well trained, equipped, or organized.^{cxixii} They took it upon themselves to encourage the buildup of militias friendly to US forces and goals, gaining valuable intelligence in the cooperation of the locals.^{cxixiii} US troops also had an excellent technical intelligence collection capability, what is now called COMINT, or communications intelligence, was developed by employing mobile radio intercept vehicles and tapping into telegraph lines for intercepts.^{cxixiv} This, combined with the fact US forces never faced defeat at the hands of Villa's troops (other clashes with Mexican Federal forces were not necessarily clear cut tactical victories, especially the embarrassment of captured US troops being used as political bargaining chips by the Carranza government) showed classic

US prowess on the battlefield. Unfortunately winning the field of battle means nothing when the struggle is for a wider, strategic ideology and winning the populace, the classic goals of counterinsurgency.

What Did Not

Outside of failing to capture Villa, not being able to stop his public relations campaign was one of the biggest failures of the US government in the strategic battle for the populace. “Villa instinctively realized that image was everything: it is not *what you were* that mattered but rather what you *seemed to be* that really counted.... [Villa was] a calculating and effective manipulator of the United States press” and the legend he built lives on today [emphasis original].^{cxxv} Villa was also excellent at exploiting the new technologies of his day to help his campaign. Not only was he good with the press, he also exploited newly widespread moving picture technology, radio, telegraph, and advances in photography to build his legend and land recruits and support.^{cxxvi}

The US thought the campaign would be short. Indeed, early successes against the Columbus raiders pointed to a quick victory.^{cxxvii} Counterinsurgencies are almost never short, and as US troops became spread out and bogged down in garrisons, the costs of keeping them there began to skyrocket. The border issue was never solved, with bandit raids and cross border operations occurring into the 1920s and beyond to present day with drug trafficking related violence currently spilling across the US border.^{cxxviii}

The US never really understood the enemy, with US hubris dictating the strategy and tactics employed as the US government and troops assumed the Mexicans “understand only the use of force in such matters” and underestimated the resistance from both insurgent and Mexico’s government, which saw the Expedition as the invasion it would become with mission creep. US forces never cooperated with nor trained Mexican Federal forces. Even the name for the force is confusing. Those who were to receive the “Punitive” portion of the Expedition were

never defined, much like the amorphous term “war on terror” that was used up until recently in the US’ current struggle.

What is learned in studying the Latin American examples and applying their lessons to the current state of the Afghanistan campaign? What needs more emphasis? What needs to be brought to the forefront of the strategic direction required for proper counterinsurgency?

Conclusion: Lessons from Latin America Applied to Afghanistan

US civilian strategic guidance and US government organization for counterinsurgency is inadequate or missing completely, forcing the US military into the counterinsurgency lead. The US Department of State’s *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* of January 2009 is a good start and recognizes the importance the whole government (with civilians in the lead) approach, but tends to mirror the military’s FM 3-24, which is an essentially modernized version of the USMC’s *Small Wars Manual*. Strategic counterinsurgency leadership should work the other way. Actually applying civilian leadership would require emphasis, education, organization and funding the Department of State (or other, special counterinsurgency organization outside of it) on a scale the Department of State has never had. The pictures of leadership familiar to the world out of Afghanistan should be of a US civilian partnered with their Afghan government counterpart. When the world and the Afghan people think of and see “leadership” in their struggle, the image should not be General McChrystal. When Mr. Holbrooke said military success is necessary to make progress in Afghanistan is only partly true. What the US government, military and civilian population needs to know is civilian progress in counterinsurgency *is* military success, not the other way around. Further study into the current state of US civilian leadership efforts and results based on what is contained in the *Guide* and the impact it is or could have if properly resourced and followed is warranted.

Air power in the form of airstrikes will always have a polarizing effect in counterinsurgency. Airstrikes are better suited for conventional conflict where tolerance for its very effective form of destruction is high, and risk to troops is mitigated through firepower. Precision does not lessen the impact on the counterinsurgency battlefield. The Segovianos' sense of honor was violated in the airstrikes, and the Afghan's *Badal* is violated in airstrikes there, regardless if the Afghan is an insurgent or not. Their death requires revenge, is exploited by the Taliban and al Qaeda and sets the US' efforts back with the Afghan government, the population, and the outside world. The same results occurred in Nicaragua. The *Small Wars Manual* fails to indicate that the actual tactics employed in Nicaragua did not eliminate the insurgency there. The air war, combined with the increasing violence on the ground, also violated the Nicaraguan's sense of honor and demanded revenge. An outside force does not win a counterinsurgency.

The Punitive Expedition, a major conventional raid, looked like an invasion to the Mexican government and populace, leading the two nations to the brink of war. The *perception* of foreign troops as invaders and occupiers was the reality to both the people of Mexico and the people of Nicaragua, and that perceived reality fueled the insurgencies in those countries. The US must show competent Afghan forces leading their struggle while not being seen as an occupier. The token two Afghans for every raiding force, as seen in some Special Operations actions, is not adequate. Any major cross border raid into Pakistan, even in "hot pursuit," would have the same effect on the Pakistani government as the Punitive Expedition did to the Carranza government in Mexico because of the presence of foreign troops on Pakistani soil. If the US perceives a weak Pakistani government or response to insurgents on the border, open cross border raids must be discouraged. In Pakistan's case, it is certainly better to let the Pakistanis do it tolerably. What the strategy behind the Punitive Expedition missed (at the beginning of the

Expedition) was the broader issue should not have been looking for revenge, but rather the heart of the issue was border security. In Afghanistan, the porous border provides the insurgency sanctuary and a base of support in Pakistan.

The insurgencies in Mexico and Nicaragua were finally resolved by the local, host nation forces and governments and not by US troops. US troop presence kept the insurgencies alive and provided focus and reason for continuation of the struggle. Apolitical, competent, host nation forces and especially police forces are key to counterinsurgency. The Guardia Nacional in Nicaragua is the perfect example of one of these forces from history. To build these forces takes time. Nicaragua's GN did not completely take control of their own forces until the USMC withdrew. The German police program in Afghanistan that was discontinued due to US impatience is the proper way to build these forces. The fruits of their now aborted efforts would just now be coming to its second generation of maturation (on the three year cycle) had the program been continued.

General McChrystal's strategy is the right direction for Afghanistan. Unfortunately it takes time, of which the US is not culturally prepared for. The past nine years have not all been in vain, with the Afghan version of the "ink blot" strategy working where it was implemented. A warning comes from Nicaragua regarding these efforts. The successful infrastructure and GN unit stand ups were put into jeopardy and in some cases discontinued altogether when the US government was forced by the economic climate of the Great Depression to choose between military efforts and civilian efforts. The US currently faces similar financial pressures with the current economy and fight for funding of domestic activities in the US. Historically military efforts (such as direct action raids), even though cut back, survive at the expense of civilian efforts and infrastructure programs due to the "immediate results" return on investment military

efforts *seem to* achieve. This course of action would be a nearsighted mistake that could lead to disaster. The long-term civilian, civilian action programs, and building up of competent indigenous forces in an insurgency are just as important as hunting down insurgent leadership or defending a garrison from attack and provide better return on investment in the long run.

The *perceived* lack of, or ineffectual, strategic Information Operations or strategic communications campaign hampered US efforts in Mexico where Villa ran rampant through the US and wider press seemingly unchecked and grew his legend and palpable support. Sandino exploited tactical mistakes in the form of heavy handedness and the perception of heavy handedness to gain recruits and broaden his support base inside and outside Nicaragua. The long-term effects of tactical mistakes (not necessarily tactical defeats) on the battlefield were exploited strategically through the mediums of the day. Their impact is still felt in Latin America. The US now must deal with the 24 hour news cycle and the quickly exploited mass media devices that exist today, the fastest means of rumor and misinformation propagation to the outside world for al Qaeda and the Taliban. The current low-tech grapevine in Afghanistan will always be a challenge to the US and Afghan governments . Regardless of the truthfulness or the means of propagation of the information that gets to the populace, their first impression is usually what sticks and this perception becomes their reality. Usually redactions or corrections to yesterday's or last week's headlines are buried, marginalized or ignored in low visibility stories or sections of their respective media. The insurgent does not have to redact or correct their misinformation.

Recommendations

The US government needs to educate, organize, equip and fund a true strategic, civilian lead entity with the sole purpose of employing focused, coherent counterinsurgency policy and

have the legal power to direct policy and support from government agencies (the office of Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization found in the State Department does not have directive power and can only go hat in hand to *coordinate* with, not *direct*, other government agencies). This policy will be the guidepost for all efforts across the board. Included in this effort must be an effective strategic communication strategy to counter the misinformation and very effective propaganda campaign al Qaeda and the Taliban employ. This entity must take the lead for US efforts based upon the direction of the Afghan government. This will require trust, patience, diplomatic education and training, but will ultimately show the Afghans taking the lead and legitimizing the government in the eyes of the populace outside of Kabul. Civilian progress is military progress in counterinsurgency. Included in the strategic communications campaign must be a part of enlightening the US population to understand successful counterinsurgency practice. Honesty in acknowledging the true long-term nature of the effort required, the increased risks involved and the reasons for them in counterinsurgency is essential to secure the US people's necessary support. A consistent and recurring message is required to counter the culturally short attention spans of the US populace.

Current policy in Afghanistan regarding restrictive rules of engagement must be continued, especially regarding airstrikes. Until effective host nation forces are fielded and self-sustaining, openly engaging and involving the population regarding plans and operational constraints, like was done in Marjah, is essential. Quickly and openly admitting to mistakes while trying to make amends will minimize their impact and get ahead of the insurgent's information campaign. Quickly pointing out and alleviating the suffering caused by the insurgency will help drive a wedge between the population and the insurgency.

Stronger population control measures will help separate the insurgent from the populace and help to track down insurgents. Part of this is seen in the biometric collection the British implemented prior to the Marjah campaign. Requiring all to carry a national identification card, or something similar, is one way to accomplish this (successfully employed in Venezuela during their urban guerilla fight). This makes it easier to separate the insurgents from the population they are hiding in.

Continuing to train host nation forces, not just army but also civilian police or paramilitary forces, needs to be a top priority. Nothing sours a population against a government faster than incompetent or corrupt local officials. They must be competent to fight off the insurgency because they are the first to be targeted, and the easiest to target, due to their high profile in the community. There are no cutting corners in the effort required to do this. Further study into the example of the Guardia Nacional (and their truly embedded leadership) is warranted. The focus should be how to apply these lessons to current issues like Afghanistan (other studies have been done, but not looking at the GN and current conditions). It took the majority of six years for the Guardia Nacional to develop before they were truly self-sustaining. The reason this effort is central to Afghanistan, looking through the lessons from Latin America, is the fact that neither example presented here was resolved fully by US/foreign troops but by the host nation themselves. They provide legitimacy and are better able to exploit the culture, political norms, and social nuances that are lost to foreigners. The polarizing effect foreign troops have is then eliminated.

The border must be secured to marginalize the safe haven on the Pakistan side of the border. The Pakistanis must do the unpalatable task of securing the Pakistani side. The US can help tremendously in training the Pakistanis in good counterinsurgency techniques to avoid the

mostly conventional efforts seen there to date, with their subsequent destructiveness. It is still better they do it tolerably themselves, regardless of the methods used. Due to the isolated nature of the border, US troops can have a better opportunity to perform border security missions due to the physical separation from the Afghan populace until competent Afghan forces can take on this role. Their physical presence in isolation from the people can give them a freedom of movement and operation not enjoyed in the cities, towns and villages. The US cultural affinity for technology (and a traditional US strength) can also be best exploited along the border. A serious effort on both sides of the border is essential to success in Afghanistan.

Progress in these efforts cannot have an artificial time limit placed on them nor artificial measures of success imposed upon them. The Afghan government must do it in their own time and in their own way, with the support of the US and its allies taking their orders from a coherent, focused civilian leadership organized for the task at hand. Then will the efforts put into General McChrystal's population centric strategy have the time and necessary backing to accomplish its goals. Major Floyd's sage words from 1927 Nicaragua apply directly to Afghanistan. Not much is needed to change them to read as if a USMC Major wrote them on the ground in Marjah showing what is necessary in Afghanistan (changes italicized):

There will be *insurgents*, smuggling, illegal arms in this country for a very long time regardless of what is done or whatever practical plan is adapted. The only way as I see it, to settle this country and restore law and order, is to radiate from *Marjah* gradually with all *Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police* as available to have the *Kabul* government declare for *Helmand Province* what is analogous to martial law with an *Afghan* officer as the head of same—such an officer should be an *Afghan National* officer.^{cxxix}

Lessons from Latin American counterinsurgencies should not be lost in the fight for Afghanistan.

Notes

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- ^{xix} Tanner, *Afghanistan*, 319, 321.
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